14: Huffman M-5 (no date) 1931
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transmitted to paper. The two missions working among the Nuer have a limited number of school-books printed in this language. The American Mission has six readers, one of which contains much folk-lore. They also have a translation of Dr. Mary Blacklock's book on Hygiene. But the white man when he arrives in Nuerland has but little to help him to a quick understanding of the language. A Nuer-English dictionary has just been published, and an English-Nuer dictionary will soon be ready for the publisher. In each a few pages of Nuer grammar has been included. But so far the white man has had to extract his knowledge of the language from the Nuer himself, and this process takes time—and patience.

The Nuer language as I have found it has an extensive vocabulary. I have listed over 3,100 words in the above mentioned dictionary, many of them root-forms only, and I constantly find how limited my knowledge of the language is. One finds new words each day. It seems like an endless mine.

In working on this language distinctive points are noted.

The same forms are used for all genders in pronouns. A change of vowel or an additional vowel is common in forming the possessive of a noun. Many proper names are the same in both masculine and feminine cases, but the prefix *nya-* or *nyan-* is always used with the feminine. The supply of adverbs seems inadequate, but possibly we have not discovered them all. Also the names of many virtues are lacking, and we frequently find that we need more adjectives. Change of inflection plays an important part in this language in making negative forms and plurals.

Nuer sentences are short. The Nuer seems to prefer a new sentence instead of using many connectives. He often states a fact, modifying it in the next sentence, e.g. 'Every one went away, I only was left.'

They may also be uttered GOD if he says anything
at all, in the petition a man on a journey makes to God as he knots 782
grasses together at the side of a path, a practice Nuer call *tuc*. A 777
man may do this because he has knocked his 'bad foot' against a stump in the path, for this presages misfortune, which can be avoided by asking God to let the badness remain in the grass so that the traveller may continue his journey with fortune. Each man has a 'good (auspicious) foot' and a 'bad (inauspicious) foot' and he learns which is which by experience. Nuer tie grass in the same manner to ensure success in any enterprise for which a journey is undertaken, often at the present day when they go to buy or beg something from an Arab merchant. They ask God to let them make a good bargain or that the merchant may make them a gift.[1] Nuer may also utter these phrases of prayer at any time as devout ejaculations, and not only when they are in trouble or desire a boon, for they have told me that they like to speak to God when they are happy (*loc tedh*) and because they are happy, and that they often say a few words to him as they go about their daily affairs.

I have already discussed the significance of some of these 782
prayerful words and expressions: 'our father', 'it is thy universe', 'it is thy will', and others. I will now consider the meaning of yet a few others, choosing for the purpose the commonest petitionary phrases. Before doing this I would draw attention to the fact that the petitioner generally uses the first person plural. In private ejaculations a Nuer may use such expressions as 'ah, my God', 'ah, God, what is this?', and 'let me journey well', but he will also use the plural pronoun, and in prayers and invocations uttered in public the plural is invariably used: 'let us be at peace', or whatever the expression may be.[2] I draw attention to this because it is not, I believe, just an indication that there are other people on whose behalf the speaker is asking God's favours. It is rather that the occasions on which prayers are publicly offered are generally

[1] Some Nuer have told me that this custom of knotting grasses originated among the Dinka. It is found among some, if not all, the Dinka tribes (R. T. Johnston, 'The Religious and Spiritual Beliefs of the Bor Dinka', *Sudan Notes and Records*, 1934, p. 126).

[2] There are two pronominal suffixes for the first person plural, *ke* and *ne*, which are respectively exclusive and inclusive. For example, 'bake ne', 'we shall go', includes the speaker and others but not the person or persons spoken to, whereas 'bene ne', 'we shall go', includes also the person or persons spoken to. In speaking to God Nuer have, of course, to use the exclusive form. [193] [195]

16: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1956
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CHAPTER V

THE PROBLEM OF SYMBOLS

In the last chapter I discussed how the Nuer conception of Spirit is figured in different ways to different persons and categories and groups. In this chapter I consider the material forms in which Spirit manifests itself or is represented. God is, properly speaking, not figured in any material representations, nor are almost all the spirits of the above, though both God and his supra-terrestrial refractions may reveal themselves in signs. But the spirits of the below are represented in creatures and things. Our problem chiefly concerns these spirits of the below. It can be simply stated by the question: What meaning are we to attach to Nuer statements that such-and-such a thing is *kwoth*, spirit? The answer is not so simple.

There are several ways in which what we would render as 'is' is indicated in the Nuer language. The one which concerns us here is the particle *e*. It is used to tell the listener that something belongs to a certain class or category and hence about some character or quality it has, as *'e dit'*, 'it is a bird', *'gat nath e cor'*, 'the Nuer is black', and *'Duob e ram me goagh'*, 'Duob is a good man.' The question we are asking is what meaning or meanings it has for Nuer when they say of something *'e kwoth'*, 'it is Spirit' (in the sense either of God or of a divine refraction).

Nuer do not claim to see God, nor do they think that anyone can know what he is like in himself. When they speak about his nature they do so by adjectives which refer to attributes, such as 'great' and 'good', or in metaphors taken from the world around them, likening his invisibility and ubiquity to wind and air, his greatness to the universe he has created, and his grandeur to an ox with widespread horns. They are no more than metaphors for Nuer, who do not say that any of these things is God, but only that he is like (*cere*) them. They express in these poetic images as best they can what they think must be some of his attributes.

Nevertheless, certain things are said, or may be said, 'to be' God —rain, lightning, and various other natural—in the Nuer way of speech, created—things which are of common interest. There is here an ambiguity, or an obscurity, to be elucidated, for Nuer are